



Focus on Water Cleanup Plans

from Ecology's Water Quality Program

Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)

Why develop water cleanup plans?

Clean water is vital for our quality of life – for both economic development and a healthy environment. Unfortunately, some water bodies are so badly polluted they need extra help. Total maximum daily loads (TMDLs), or water cleanup plans, describe the type, amount, and sources of water pollution in a particular water body; analyze how much the pollution needs to be reduced to achieve clean water; and provide strategies to control pollution.

The federal Clean Water Act requires states to prepare a list of water bodies that do not meet standards. Water quality standards are set to ensure the water is healthy for such uses as fish and wildlife habitat, agricultural water supplies, and recreation in and on the water. All water bodies identified on the list must attain water quality standards within a reasonable period, either through a water cleanup plan or other pollution control mechanisms.

What is the schedule for Washington's cleanup plans?

As a result of a 1998 legal settlement agreement, the Department of Ecology (Ecology) has been given a deadline of 2013 to develop and implement plans to clean up 1,500 listings that apply to about 650 polluted water bodies throughout the state. Most listed water bodies are affected by more than one pollutant. Ecology is working with local governments, businesses, and citizens to develop solutions to improve water quality.

Who is responsible for implementation?

Ecology regulates point sources (pollution that generally comes out of a pipe or an activity that has a wastewater or stormwater permit) by placing limits on discharges. For pollution from nonpoint sources (pollution that comes from many smaller, diffuse sources), Ecology works with other agencies, local governments, landowners, and citizens to identify and implement specific pollution controls or “best management practices.”

How is the cleanup of waters progressing?

The 1998 settlement agreement established a schedule for completing the 1,500 required water cleanup plans by 2013. The schedule includes interim targets at five-year intervals. We achieved the first five-year target of 249 cleanup plans required by June 30, 2003.

We have learned a lot from the cleanup plans we've already done, and we are now implementing some new strategies because of what we've learned. These include addressing all pollutants in a watershed at one time, standardizing procedures and reports, and capitalizing on partnerships. In addition, future cleanup plans will benefit from working with existing committees and with

entities that now have experience in the process. This experience should allow communities to move more quickly to take action to improve water quality. In any given year, Ecology is typically working on approximately 100 cleanup plans at various stages of development.

Is water quality improving?

Examples of success

Western Washington

State and local partners in the Nooksack River basin went into action with a plan to reduce fecal coliform bacteria in 1998. Actions included working with dairy farms and small farms with horses or beef cattle, analyzing on-site septic systems, and monitoring to measure the effectiveness of the actions. Since 1998, fecal coliform bacteria have been reduced 63 percent in the Nooksack River and between 40 and 80 percent in all of its major tributaries. As a result of the work to date, shellfish beds in Portage Bay have experienced improved water quality that resulted in additional acres of shellfish beds being moved into approved status in 2004. Water quality testing shows some areas still need improvement to achieve a June 2005 goal of meeting water quality standards in the Nooksack River and its major tributaries. Continued coordination between state and local authorities will be necessary to achieve the goal.

Eastern Washington

Last year, Ecology, in partnership with the Yakama Nation, performed effectiveness monitoring for the Lower Yakima River mainstem. The Lower Yakima River was polluted with pesticides and sediments. Data indicated that after five years of implementation activities, targets of the Lower Yakima River suspended sediment and DDT water cleanup plan were met. Water quality improvement is the result of significant work by the Roza and Sunnyside irrigation districts and individual landowners to improve irrigation practices.

Others

There are other areas where we are seeing better water quality as a result of TMDLs. Some examples include improved shellfish operations as a result of reduced bacteria counts in the Chehalis and Stillaguamish rivers. Fish habitat improvements are resulting from implementation of the Simpson Timberlands temperature TMDL on the Olympic Peninsula. Local groups are hard at work maintaining the phosphorus levels in Lake Chelan. In addition, wastewater treatment plant upgrades, streamside plantings, pet-waste control, fencing, and culvert repairs are happening all over the state. We are pleased with these actions and are working to expand local involvement and the number of water bodies seeing improvements statewide.



Before

Animals have access to the salmon stream.



After

Cleanup plan work included fencing the riparian area and restoring the stream banks with native vegetation.

Where will we begin working this year?

Each year, Ecology evaluates the need for water cleanup plans in various parts of the state. Decisions on which plans are to be completed next are made with the help of local communities.

Water Cleanup Plan List (begin work July 2005)

Regional Office	Primary Location	Waterbody(s) Name	Pollution Problems
CRO	Yakima County	Selah Ditch (If resources are available)	Fecal Coliform (bacteria), Temperature, Dissolved Oxygen
CRO	Kittitas County	Upper Yakima River	Temperature
ERO	Whitman County	Palouse River (Note: This project has been delayed)	Dissolved Oxygen, pH, Fecal Coliform (bacteria), Ammonia, Temperature, Toxic Chemicals
ERO	Spokane County	Newman Lake	Phosphorus
NWRO	Skagit County	Samish Watershed	Fecal Coliform (bacteria)
NWRO	Snohomish County	Old Stillaguamish Channel in Stillaguamish River Watershed	Dissolved Oxygen, pH
NWRO	King, Snohomish counties	Little Bear Creek	Fecal Coliform (bacteria)
SWRO	Clark, Skamania counties	East Fork Lewis River	Temperature, Fecal Coliform (bacteria)
SWRO	Lewis, Cowlitz, Skamania counties	Gifford Pinchot National Forest	Temperature

What is planned for next year? (begin work July 2006)

We are gathering initial information in the following counties to identify water bodies needing water cleanup plans for fiscal 2006:

- Western Washington: Island, King, Snohomish, Pierce, Thurston
- Eastern Washington: Adams, Franklin, Grant, Lincoln, Okanogan

Future considerations

Ecology is working with many local, state, and federal agencies to meet the water cleanup plan schedule and improve the health of Washington's waters. We are partnering with the EPA, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Navy, King County Department of Natural Resources, and numerous local governments to clean up specific water bodies of special interest to those agencies.

For more information, please contact:

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